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ABSTRACT

The people of the United States have always been determinedly religious. What is new is the public recognition of this fact and the debate over the problems that attend it. In high schools and colleges across the country, students are reading textbooks that state as fact that the United States is, or is rapidly becoming, a secular society, an assumption not supported by empirical evidence. The massive "Middletown III" study of Muncie, Indiana, directed by Theodore Caplow concluded that the people of the United States are more religious today than they were a hundred years ago. Although the public resurgence of religion is hardly limited to fundamentalism, fundamentalists are a primary focus of the public debate. Fundamentalist political activism may be viewed as an "aggressive defense." This defense is directed against what they perceive to be governmental actions dictated by "secular humanists." However, even those who try to understand the religious Right sympathetically wonder exactly what the Fundamentalists want. One useful answer is the American Coalition for Traditional Values' (ACTV) list of ten issues in its campaign to "restore traditional moral and spiritual values" to U.S. life. The list includes prayer and Bible reading in public schools, a "pro-life" constitutional amendment, legal restrictions on pornography, an end to state "harassment" of Christian schools, resistance to feminist and gay rights legislation, increased defense spending, and the termination of social programs that may only increase the dependency of the poor. (BZ)

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What the Fundamentalists Want

Richard John Neuhaus

Foreword by William F. Buckley, Jr.

Ethics and Public Policy Center • Washington, D.C.

Foreword

Pastor Richard John Neuhaus is a brilliant and learned writer and theologian, but he isn't going to let those awful weights keep him out of the public discussion. His book *The Naked Public Square* has had a considerable impact. It argued, in effect, the Reagan position of a year ago, namely, that in fact you cannot totally separate religion from politics because religion not only does, but must, inform politics at some very critical levels. But of course in siding with Reagan, one must never quite let it appear as though that were what one was doing, or, *zap!* there goes your audience, if it is liberal intellectuals you want to talk to. Accordingly, he finds searching and ingenious metaphors, among them precisely that "public square"—which is the agora of democracies. Where we talk to each other. Exchange opinions. Crystallize a consensus. It is Pastor Richard's point that that public square in which we meet to have those conversations simply can't be empty—of tradition, inherited insights: ideas and commandments associated with the divine order.

Now Pastor Richard has written this piece he calls "What the Fundamentalists Want." It originally appeared in *Commentary* magazine, over which Norman Podhoretz has presided for twenty-five years, as important a tenure as any in the cultural history of this century. Pastor Richard has devastating points to make, but he makes them with a combination of geniality and icy intellectual trenchancy that leaves his opponents helpless on the floor: but not a bit mad, I would guess, at Pastor Richard, and to do that takes great skills.

What he does is examine the feverish opposition to the fundamentalists, which, even at the risk of simplification, we can think of as Norman Lear *v.* Jerry Falwell, the two embodying what is loosely thought of as the civil-rights movement versus the religious-Right movement.

What Pastor Richard explains is that for many years the assumption has been that the more educated you become, the less likely it is that you will believe in any religion. The high moment of that reading of American history came when Clarence Darrow routed William Jennings Bryan in a debate on fundamentalism, after which Bryan could think of nothing else to do but go off and die.

But a funny thing happened to religion on the way to desuetude, Pastor Richard points out. It not only didn't languish: It has become stronger than ever. A study by Theodore Caplow of the University of Virginia (*All Faithful People*) absolutely documents that religion is stronger in America today than it was one hundred years ago; not only documents this, but goes on to remark that religious leaders in America, as also their flocks, are far more tolerant of deviant thought (among the nonreligious) than they were at the time of Darrow-Bryan.

What is the meaning of this? Well at the very least, it is very good news for those who have been apprehensive about the threat of the theocratization of America.

But isn't it true that the religious Right has made some very loud and demanding noises?

Not quite the way to put it, says Pastor Richard soothingly. What has happened is that the religious Right has, in the words of Seymour Martin Lipset, engaged in an "aggressive defense" of traditional values, fighting back against the aggressive secularism of the Supreme Court and the Internal Revenue Service. Concretely, the American Coalition for Traditional Values wishes for "prayer and Bible reading in public schools, a 'pro-life' amendment (or some other instrument for overruling *Roe* v. *Wade*), legal restrictions on pornography, an end to state 'harassment' of Christian schools, resistance to feminist and gay-rights legislation, increased defense spending, and terminating social programs that, it is believed, only increase the dependency of the poor." And the author adds, "Even some of the committed opponents of the religious Right might concede that most, if not all, of these items are legitimate issues for debate in a democratic society."

Richard John Neuhaus does not deny that here and there the rhetoric is obnoxious. "But I do believe that those who compare our situation to that of the Weimar Republic or the religious Right to the Nazis have fallen victim to polemical heat prostration." A wonderful tonic for this disease is a thoughtful half-hour reading this essay by Pastor Richard.

William F. Buckley, Jr.

What the Fundamentalists Want

Richard John Neuhaus

DISTINGUISHED social analysts, surveying the complexities of our religious, cultural, and political situation, have offered their considered judgment that: "The Falwells are coming! The Falwells are coming!" The less distinguished have joined in sounding the tocsin, and the alarm is getting louder. We can expect it to get louder still. If alarm is our only response to the public resurgence of religion in American life, there is reason for alarm. Yet among those who speak for the knowledge class, alarm has been the dominant, in some cases the only, response to date. It has been more reaction than response; reaction to alleged reactionaries, and therefore reactionary twice over.

Jerry Falwell, Ed McAteer, Gary Jarmin, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Robison, Tim LaHaye—they are, so we hear, out to take over America and establish a theocracy in which all who disagree will be, at best, second-class citizens. But surely, we may think, nobody really believes such alarmist nonsense. Nonsense or not, reports of the great terror that is upon us are raising millions of dollars in fund appeals by Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women, Norman Lear's People for the American Way, and others who claim to believe that the religious Right is the greatest peril to American democracy since Joe McCarthy. Whatever else the religious Right may be, it is a bonanza for its opponents. And if its opponents are right about the "whatever else" the religious Right may be, the money is well given and well spent in warding off the threat.

Thus full-page advertisements in prestige newspapers inform us that the religious Right is determined to abolish the no-establishment clause of the First Amendment, impose its fundamentalist morality upon all of us through law, put politicians in our bedrooms, censor what we may read and see, and then, for good measure, blow up the world in order to force history's denouement in the final act of Armageddon. Truth to tell, it is possible to find statements by leaders of the religious Right who in spasms of sermonic excess have suggested that they intend to do all these unpleasant things, and more. But they should not be caricatured by their hyperbolic lapses any more than they should caricature their opponents as friends of pornography, incest, pedophilia, drug-tripping, and treasonous opinion, although, truth to tell again, many of their opponents are on friendly terms with some or all of these. I have been warned that, by not taking at face value some of the more bizarre statements issuing from the religious Right, I am making the same mistake made by those who brushed aside the "hyperbole" of the Brown Shirts. For solemn reasons, no reference to the Third Reich should be dismissed lightly. For the same solemn reasons, the experience of the Third Reich should not be trivialized by such facile reference. But I do believe that those who compare our situation to that of the Weimar republic or the religious Right to the Nazis have fallen victim to polemical heat prostration.

"When I hear the words 'Christian America' I see barbed wire," a notably liberal Reform rabbi tells me. I do not doubt him, but then he and a surprising number of others have a curious view of, among other things, Christianity. In this view the high points, sometimes the only points, of two millennia of Christian history are the blood curse upon the Jews, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust. This way of telling the Christian story is not unlike telling the story of America exclusively in terms of Salem witch-hunts, Indian massacres, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and alleged preparations for a nuclear first strike. Both stories, while highlighting some important truths, profoundly distort the tales they would tell.

Those who are most vocally anxious about Christian America usually have a special kind of Christian in mind. They do not worry about people who "happen to be" Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, Catholic, or whatever. Even less worrisome are people who add that they happen to be whatever they happen to be "by background." These are the liberally acculturated who do not let their religion stick out or get in the way of living like normal people. They are, as Mort Sahl

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said of Adlai Stevenson, the sort of people who believe in the "Ten Suggestions" and who would —were they members of the Ku Klux Klan—burn a question mark on your lawn. With Christians like that, Christian America is no problem. But then there are those other Christians who do not just happen to be but really are. And what they really are frequently carries an off-brand name, such as Independent Baptist, Holiness, Pentecostal, or Assemblies of God.

Many of us have never actually met one of these people, and almost nobody we know has ever actually met one, but there they are, millions of them, "out there." And we are inclined to think that we know all about them. In a recent interview Norman Lear explains how People for the American Way got started. After leaving the television comedies, "I was planning to write a film called *Religion*, because I was fascinated with the use of religion as a tax dodge by so many people who become ministers in order to write off a chunk of their living expenses. In order to prepare, I started watching how the reverends were functioning on television . . . and very quickly became concerned about the way they were mixing politics and religion." Lear goes on to suggest that the television evangelists are less interested in religion than in gaining political power. At the same time, he is outraged because they believe that "only those who accept a particular version of Jesus Christ as their savior will go to heaven and all others will go to hell." "In some profound way that we never shake, even Jews—and of course Christians—believe that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell," says Lear.

Norman Lear is also in this respect typical of the reaction of many to the religious Right. They cannot make up their minds whether these television evangelists are religiously sincere or not. Even more troubling, they cannot decide whether it would be better if the evangelists were sincere. Ordinarily, sincerity gets a gold star in the kindergarten of contemporary culture, but not when sincerity is "divisive" in its violation of the rules of a pluralistic society. It is worth noting too that in a film titled *Religion* the subject was to be, of course, religious charlatanism.

For the image of Elmer Gantry runs deep in American elite culture and is now frequently and variously invoked in reaction to the religious Right. The leaders of the religious Right are said to be playing upon a nostalgia for an America that never was, but there is nostalgia too among critics who have revived the cast of villains from the 1920's. After the intellectual fads and passions of intervening decades, the world has become simpler again. Our sense of superiority is assured as we take our stand once more with H.L. Mencken against the "booboisie," the Victorians, Puritans, Yahoos, and rednecks, the benighted denizens of Gopher Prairie (now Virginia Beach) and Winesburg (now Lynchburg). Perhaps even the Left Bank and Greenwich Village will come back and, by the inadvertent grace of Jerry Falwell, it will again be possible to be a bohemian.

But such nostalgic fantasies are dispelled as we are recalled to the sure knowledge that this is not the way things were supposed to be in the future that is our present. Etched upon the mind of every educated American is Mencken's acidly brilliant derision of William Jennings Bryan in the company of his "rustic gorillas," utterly discredited and limping off the Tennessee stage to a timely death. There is more than one "teaching of contempt," and this one most of us learned well. But now some of us are no longer so certain, Broadway notwithstanding, that we understand who sowed the wind and who is reaping the whirlwind. Something has gone radically wrong with the script of modernity. We tell ourselves that this religious Right, indeed the more general phenomenon of religion bursting-out all over, is atavistic, a temporary malfunction in the ordering of time. Until we recognize that it is the certitudes of Clarence Darrow which now seem pitiably quaint, while the future is claimed by "high-tech" religious communicators who style themselves the American Coalition for Traditional Values. Little wonder that sectors of our cultural leadership show every sign of having gone into cultural shock.

IN FACT this new situation is not so new. The American people have always been determinedly, some would say incorrigibly, religious. What is new is the public recognition of this fact and the debate over the problems that attend it. To put it differently, what was thought to be a private and therefore eminently ignorable reality is spilling over into the public arena in most inconvenient ways. The spillover, or inundation, as some would have it, has been most visibly occasioned by the emergence of the religious Right. As it happens, on the map of American religion, politicized fundamentalism is a minority phenomenon. This minority, however, has kicked a tripwire alerting us to the much larger reality of unsecular America. As in 1962 Michael Harrington alerted public opinion to the forgotten minority of "The Other America," so the religious Right has thrown open the closet door to expose the beliefs, fears, and aspirations shared by an overwhelming majority of Americans of almost every description.

In high schools and colleges across the country students are reading textbooks that state in a taken-for-granted manner that America is, or is rapidly becoming, a secular society. If religion is mentioned at all, it is said that people once found answers to their problems in religious teaching, but, of course, that is no longer possible in "our increasingly secular and pluralistic society."

Yet the proposition that America is, or is becoming, a secular society has everything going for it except the empirical evidence. The proposition

is tied to a two-part dogma which has exercised an intellectual hegemony for nearly two hundred years. The dogma states that as people become more enlightened (read, more educated) religion will wither away. The second part of the dogma states that, to the extent religion endures, it is a residual phenomenon that can be hermetically sealed off in the "private sphere" of life, safely removed from the public arena where, by the canons of secular "rationality," we debate and decide the ordering of our life together. This is a hypothesis about historical development. As such it is subject to historical confirmation or falsification. At least in America, it has been historically falsified.

Survey research does not tell the whole story, but it tells an important part of it. It matters little whether one consults Gallup, Roper, or some other study; on some questions the answers are as close to unanimity as allowed by margins of error. For example, 94 percent of the American people profess belief in God, 88 percent say the Bible is the inspired word of God, 90 percent identify themselves religiously with a specific Christian denomination or as Jews, 89 percent of us say we pray regularly, and so forth. Why do some otherwise thoughtful people go on insisting that there is no frame of reference for a moral consensus among the American people? With near unanimity Americans say that morality is derived from the Jewish and Christian traditions (the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the teachings of the Church, etc.). There is in fact a shared world of moral reference, a common vocabulary, that can be drawn upon in public discourse.

I said that with "near unanimity" Americans believe that moral judgment is derived from our Jewish and Christian traditions. The problem is with the "near." The civil libertarian immediately, and rightly, asks about those who dissent from that view—the religiously indifferent, the atheist, the declared "secular humanist," as well as the Buddhist or Muslim.

For one answer, we can turn to the massive "Middletown III" study of Muncie, Indiana, directed by Theodore Caplow of the University of Virginia and sponsored by the National Science Foundation, which is pertinent to the question both of religious resurgence and religious tolerance. In *All Faithful People* (University of Minnesota, 1983), Caplow and his colleagues demonstrate that, contrary to the expectations of Robert and Helen Lynd who did the original Middletown study in the mid 20's, the people of Muncie are dramatically more religious today than they were then. Comparisons of the Muncie data with national surveys convincingly show that Muncie is not an exception on this score. Of course one can be skeptical about the authenticity, however defined, of this religiousness; survey research cannot search the interstices of the human heart. But it can measure the social reality. It can measure what people say they believe (for example, in Muncie 97 percent say the Bible is inspired and 86 percent "have no doubt" about the divinity of Jesus). It can measure churchgoing, rites of passage (marriages, funerals, etc.) under religious auspices, the time and money given to religious purposes, and numerous other facts of behavior. The farther back we go in time the less scientifically rigorous are the data, but on the evidence available Caplow thinks it reasonable to conclude that Americans are more religious today than they were, say, a hundred years ago.

Studies such as Middletown III have caused a remarkable turnaround among social theorists who had supposed there to be a necessary connection between increased modernity and increased secularization. As Peter L. Berger, arguably America's premier sociologist of religion, remarked at a recent conference, the evidence had been accumulating for some years, "but the Caplow study has put the final nail in the coffin of the theory that modernity means secularity."

On the question of tolerance, Caplow says that, "In a liberal perspective, these findings are almost too good to be true." But rechecking and rechecking again only reinforces the conclusion that, as the people of Muncie have become more religious, they have also become more tolerant. "We cannot turn up a group whose religious chauvinism comes anywhere near the level that was normal in 1924," Caplow reports. In this connection it is important to note that the research includes the fundamentalist Christians who are thought to be least tolerant of others. Of this "extraordinary ecumenicism" Caplow ventures the suggestion that "such a situation may never before have existed in the long history of Christianity." A clear and positive correlation between religious commitment and religious tolerance would seem to turn the conventional wisdom on its head.

Caplow offers several speculations on "why Middletown people are so reluctant to lay down the law or to expound the prophets for the benefit of their neighbors." One reason, Caplow suggests, is that religious people tend to think they are in the minority. They believe "the stereotyped misreading of social change" promulgated by television and other media which persuades them that religion is weaker than it is. The result is that "Devout Christians in Middletown, like happily married couples there, regard themselves as exceptional: surrounded by people just like themselves, they think they stand quite alone."

Another explanation is that the people of Middletown believe it is wrong, *morally* wrong, for anybody, and most especially for the state, to mess around with other people's souls. In other words, it is the will of God that we be tolerant of those who disagree with us about the will of God. Respect for those who believe differently or do not believe at all stems not from religious indifference but from religious commitment. If this interpreta-

tion is correct, it is very good news indeed for the future of religious freedom in America.

II

THE public resurgence of religion is hardly limited to fundamentalism, but fundamentalists are the main focus of the public debate. The key leaders of the American Coalition for Traditional Values (ACTV—pronounced "active"), for example, are fundamentalists. This does not mean that all fundamentalists support the religious Right, and it certainly does not mean that the religious Right is exclusively fundamentalist. Many, perhaps most, fundamentalists still adhere to the maxim that was almost universal among fundamentalists only a few years ago: "Religion and politics don't mix." Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority was eloquent in arguing that proposition against Martin Luther King, Jr. and other clergy in the civil-rights movement. The pattern in the media and elsewhere is to use the term fundamentalist in a careless way that refers to anything we deem religiously bizarre or fanatical. Thus journalists refer to Islamic fundamentalists and polemicists compare Jerry Falwell with the Ayatollah Khomeini. The pattern reflects intellectual laziness mixed with an unseemly measure of bigotry.

Fundamentalism derives its name from *The Fundamentals*, twelve paperback books issued from 1910 to 1915 which received enormous circulation. Written by conservative American and British writers, these books constituted a frontal assault upon religious "modernism." Modernism, in turn, was the confident liberal doctrine that there is an almost perfect congruence between God's will and the inevitable progress of civilization, especially American civilization. The fundamentalists believed that this was a false religion and that most of the Protestant churches in America had sold out to it. (It is of more than passing interest that, while today millions of Americans call themselves fundamentalists, almost nobody calls himself a modernist.)

In its early years fundamentalism had some formidable intellectual leadership. For instance, J. Gresham Machen, professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, made an impressive case in *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) that religious liberalism was in fact not Christianity but a new religion that, while using Christian symbols and language, replaced faith in God with faith in humanity and historical progress. Most fundamentalists boiled their case down to insistence upon five "fundamentals": the inerrancy of Scripture (the Bible contains no errors in any subject on which it speaks); the virgin birth of Jesus (the Spirit of God conceived Jesus in Mary without human intervention); the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ (on the cross he bore the just punishment for the sins of the entire world); his bodily resurrection; the authenticity of the biblical miracles; and pre-millennialism.

The last point touches on the question of, among other things, Armageddon, a question which erupted in, of all places, the 1984 presidential campaign. All orthodox Christians believe in the return of Jesus in glory and the establishment of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history. Some Christian groups are pre-millennialist, others are post-millennialist, and some do not take a position on the question. Both post- and pre-millennialists believe there will be on earth a thousand-year-reign of perfect peace, justice, and harmony with God's will. Pre-millennialists believe that Jesus will return first and then there will be that millennium; post-millennialists say the millennium will be established first and then Jesus will return in glory. The debate turns upon the interpretation of some marvelously obscure passages in the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel and the last book of the Christian Scriptures, Revelation.

In the past it was generally thought that pre-millennialist Christians would be politically passive, because there wasn't much point in trying to change the world before Jesus returns to set everything right. The important thing was not social reform but saving individual souls. At the end of the last century, before the fundamentalist-modernist split was formalized, evangelist Dwight L. Moody set forth the pre-millennialist thesis: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.' " Post-millennialists, on the other hand, were avid social reformers, eager to put the world in order, establish the millennium, and thus hasten the return of Jesus. (The more modernist among them thought the last point to be an inspiring metaphor not to be taken literally.) But today the most aggressive political activism is being pushed by pre-millennialists.

The change is causing considerable consternation within the fundamentalist world. Fundamentalism is magnificently fissiparous. The local churches jealously protect their independence from any larger association. Leaders can cooperate in groups such as ACTV and the Moral Majority because, it is repeatedly emphasized, they are not religious but political organizations. If non-fundamentalists worry about what fundamentalists say about them, it is as nothing compared with what they routinely say about one another. Bob Jones (of Bob Jones University) has declared that Jerry Falwell is the greatest instrument of Satan in America today. While they are partners in a moral crusade, off the platform one partner does not hesitate to announce that one or more of the other partners is surely going to hell. That God will not hear their prayers is the least of it. The public platform and the pulpit platform engage two quite different worlds of discourse. The Moral Majority advertises and carefully nurtures its

support from Catholics, Jews, and non-believers. But membership in the Moral Majority, it is made unmistakably clear, is not to be confused with membership in the company of the truly saved.

Jews are notably and understandably interested in their part in fundamentalist scenarios for the End Time. These scenarios are closely linked, of course, to the fundamentalists' impassioned support for the state of Israel. They involve the Rapture, Armageddon, the final war with the Soviet Union, and other items of high drama which cannot delay us here. Suffice it to say that, while all orthodox Christians say Jesus will return, most fundamentalists are "dispensationalists" who derive from "Bible prophecy" a quite precise blueprint and timetable for the return. There are, they believe, dispensations or ordered events and time periods predicted in the Bible. Jews are critical to the final act. There is considerable confusion over whether this means that the Jews will finally be converted to Christianity. The alternative way of putting it, which is increasingly accepted, is that Jews will be fulfilled in their Jewishness in welcoming their long-awaited messiah, who will turn out to be Jesus of Nazareth. He will not be the "Christian" messiah but most definitely the Jewish messiah, as he has been the Jewish messiah for Christians all along. As one rabbi has told me, "I can't get exercised over this dispute. If and when all this happens, we will see whether the one who comes is coming for the first time or the second time. I only hope that when we meet we'll be glad to see one another."

Christians of all persuasions have had a difficult time finding a secure theological place for living Judaism. There is little problem with the Jews of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament, as Christians say) and dispensationalists have an important role for Jews in the End Time, but Judaism between the biblical prophets and the eschaton is something of an anomaly. Today this may be changing as Christians are reflecting in a new way upon Paul's explorations (Romans 9 through 11) into the "mystery" of living Judaism and what it means that God will never break His covenant with the people of Israel. Fundamentalists too are increasingly insistent that this mystery means that the nation that blesses the Jews will be blessed and the nation that curses them will be cursed. It is less a sense of guilt over the Holocaust —which is viewed as something perpetrated by other people in a distant land—than of Divine purpose that gives Judaism and the state of Israel such a special place in the fundamentalist world view.

Of course some Jews protest that it is demeaning to be fitted into a theological system to which they do not subscribe. This, I believe, may be a mistake. Acceptance of Jews, which means also resistance to anti-Semitism, is better secured when it is religiously grounded. Some Jews take a more pragmatic view in welcoming fundamentalist support for Israel in particular. Irving Kristol recently noted, "It is their theology, but it is our Israel." To that sage observation I would add that Israel is more firmly supported *because* it is their theology and not simply their prudential geopolitical judgment.

IF A previously apolitical pre-millennialist fundamentalism has now turned in an activist direction, fundamentalist leaders did not just get together one day and decide to go political. They felt, and they feel, that they are responding to an assault upon their religious freedom. As Seymour Martin Lipset has put it, their activism may be viewed as an "aggressive defense." Their defense is against what they perceive as governmental actions dictated by the "secular humanists" in control of American public life. Ten years ago, before the religious Right was a major factor, Leo Pfeffer (then of the American Jewish Congress) saw the dynamic that would produce this response. "Matters which have long been considered private," he wrote, "are increasingly becoming the concern of government." He added, "The thirst for power is a potent force even in a democracy, and the state will be tempted and will yield to the temptation of seeking to exercise dominion over religion for no other reason than because it is there."

There were several flashpoints that contributed to the political activation of fundamentalism. Of enormous importance was the outlawing of prayer in the public schools in the early 1960's. These court decisions sent a seismic shock that traveled far beyond the worlds of fundamentalism. Whatever one may think of the merits of school prayers, their removal was understandably seen as a major step toward the secularization of public space. An incorrigibly and increasingly religious society simply does not understand why children cannot publicly acknowledge God in the classroom, nor why, as another court ruling determined, the Ten Commandments cannot be posted on the classroom wall.

As important as these court rulings were, the religious Right was activated by the increasing aggressiveness of the Internal Revenue Service and other government agencies in "interfering" with the free exercise of religion. During the 1960's and 1970's the IRS moved in the direction of treating tax exemption for religion as a tax subsidy. The reasoning here is that money exempted from taxation is in fact a governmental expenditure, and what the government spends the government should control. It is again understandable that fundamentalists, and not only fundamentalists, believe that implicit in this reasoning is a massive, even totalitarian, expansion of state control over religion and other exempt forms of voluntary activity. Moreover, fundamentalists in particular found themselves in collision

with state educational authorities over the control of their Christian day schools. They believe, rightly or wrongly, that some state requirements for the certification of teachers and curricula exceed any legitimate public purpose and threaten to dissolve the religious distinctiveness of the alternative education they have elected for their children.

In discussing the "assaults" that sparked the defensive reaction of the religious Right, I have not mentioned the 1973 *Roe* v. *Wade* decision and abortion on demand. It is generally acknowledged that abortion was not that important in the generating passions of the religious Right. Until a very few years ago it was merely included in the catalogue of our society's "decadence," along with drugs, pornography, homosexual activism, and an exploding divorce rate. Today, of course, the limiting of abortions (or, as they prefer, the protection of unborn life) is high on the agenda of the religious Right, and of many millions of Americans who in no way identify with the religious Right.

EVEN those who try to understand the religious Right sympathetically find themselves asking, "Yes, but what else do they want?" One useful answer is ACTV's list of ten issues in its campaign to "restore traditional moral and spiritual values" to American life. The list includes prayer and Bible reading in public schools, a "pro-life" amendment (or some other instrument for overruling *Roe* v. *Wade*), legal restrictions on pornography, an end to state "harassment" of Christian schools, resistance to feminist and gay-rights legislation, increased defense spending, and terminating social programs that, it is believed, only increase the dependency of the poor. Even some of the committed opponents of the religious Right might concede that most, if not all, of these items are legitimate issues for debate in a democratic society. Yet many people are alarmed, for they thought that all these issues had been "settled." Only now has it become evident that, at least on some of these issues, a majority of the American people had not consented to the settlement.

Leaders of the religious Right have expressed surprise at what they view as the hysterical reaction to their enterprise. Jerry Falwell and some others increasingly try to calm the reaction by expressing devotion to the rules of liberal democracy (yes, *liberal* democracy) and by distancing themselves from the anti-democratic theocrats who are attracted to the cause. Falwell and others are publicly insistent that they are not advocating an officially "Christian America." Beneath the public gloating over their triumphs recent and portending is evidence of a deep insecurity about the power they are believed to possess. These people are not accustomed to being viewed with such intense fear and loathing. With loathing, yes. During their half-century in the religious, cultural, and political wilderness, fundamentalists knew that they were the object of deepest contempt, and that knowledge reinforced their determination to have nothing to do with the "principalities and powers" of the American establishments. But the sensation of being feared is something new. They find it hard to believe that the "northeasternliberalestablishment" (one word) could be so easily intimidated, as some who are of that establishment may also find it hard to believe. Finding it hard to believe, some of us try to persuade ourselves of what it is almost impossible to believe, namely, that the religious Right and the conservative trend of which it is part are but a passing aberration and tomorrow morning we will wake up to discover that America has returned to "normalcy."

The activist fundamentalists want us to know that they are not going to go back to the wilderness. Many of them, being typical Americans, also want to be loved. They explain, almost apologetically, that they did not really want to bash in the door to the public square, but it was locked, and nobody had answered their knocking. Anyway, the hinges were rusty and it gave way under pressure that was only a little more than polite. And so the country cousins have shown up in force at the family picnic. They want a few rules changed right away. Other than that they promise to behave, provided we do not again try to exclude them from family deliberations. Surely it is incumbent on the rest of us, especially those who claim to understand our society, to do more in response to this ascendance of fundamentalism—and indeed of religion in general—than to sound an increasingly hysterical and increasingly hollow alarm.

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